

**Testimony of Ricky P. of Baltimore, Maryland,
to the Congress of the United States
May 2, 2005**

My name is Ricky P. I live and work in West Baltimore. Congressman Cummings knows how to reach me, but, with all due respect, I am not making my address public knowledge by this statement. I am afraid to do that.

I make my living as a barber, and people talk to me while I cut their hair. What I want to say to you, our elected representatives, is this: All of the people I know and the people I meet on my job are just as afraid as I am. They are afraid, and they are angry.

People are afraid because almost all of them know someone who has been shot or killed B often someone in their own families: their fathers, their mothers, even their children.

People are afraid because - with all due respect - the drug dealers and their guns, not our elected officials and police, are the true law in our city. The drug dealers and their thugs are the forces that will make their will stick by threats and murder if we go against them.

And people are afraid because they know that if we decide to do the right thing and go against the thugs and their guns, we should be saving our money to take care of our families after we are dead and gone.

So, that is the first thing I need to tell my elected Representatives, and the second is this: People are angry because they know (and, with all due respect, you know this as well) that the politicians and the police and the people with money have found ways to make themselves safe B while leaving the rest of us to take care of ourselves.

A lot of you have moved to the suburbs. Some of you live in buildings with guards. The garages where you park your cars are safer than the streets of our community.

That is the truth, honorable Representatives; and another truth is that we pay our taxes that pay for the guards and metal detectors where the powerful people like you work and live.

We don't want to take that protection away from you - but the people of my community have to ask you: "Why don't our tax dollars pay for the same protection and security where we live and work?"

That is the question that people in my community are asking and the answer to that question is what makes us angry. The answer, in the minds of people in my community, is that we must pay to protect the rich and powerful, while we, ourselves, are left to be threatened and killed -- especially if we cooperate with the police.

We are being asked to risk ourselves and our families in ways that no one with power and money would accept for himself and the people he loves.

People believe this because it is the truth B a truth that we know from the experience of our lives.

Honored Representatives, I respect you because you are trying to do something to protect my family and community. You are trying to convince the Congress to take just a small part of the tax dollars that we are now using to protect other people and spend it on protecting us.

You always say that these tax dollars are our money. Well, we would like to use some of that money of ours to protect our families - just as we are trying to protect powerful people here in the U.S. and people in foreign countries.

If you say that you are determined to uphold the law and that you want and need our help, that is good. We will support that. The fact that we are afraid does not mean that we don't have the courage to do the right thing.

However, we are not going to give up our lives for nothing.

You and I know that we only have three possible choices about protecting witnesses in court from the drug powers in our community:

First, you can spend our tax dollars to put more police officers on our streets so that people in my community won't be confronting the drug dealers face-to-face and getting themselves killed.

Second, you can spend our tax dollars to allow our city and state to give those of us with the courage to stand up in court and tell about the crimes that we see every day the same kind and level of witness protection that the federal courts and marshals give to federal witnesses that they need.

These two choices are the ones that the people of this country want you to make. We pray that you will do the right thing.

But, please, don't pretend to protect us when you are not willing to do what is required to be effective. If you won't provide us with more police protection in our communities and truly protect us when you need us to testify about the crimes that we see, your only other choice - the unwise choice - is this:

Your only other choice is to give up. Your only other choice is to accept the truth of our community and our streets that the drug gangs are going to be the true law in this country.

I must warn you, though, of one final truth. If the Congress continues to make this unwise choice, some day (and soon), the drug gangs are going to be the true law in your communities, as well.

This is the truth as I see it. This is my testimony.

Thank you.

Ricky P., a citizen of the United States.